

## Gout Causes

You've probably heard of gout, a painful condition that causes swelling in the hands and feet. But, did you know that gout is actually a form of arthritis?

There are actually more than 100 different types of arthritis. Gout is one common manifestation of arthritis that has been noted in medical records for thousands of years. It is estimated that today, a half million Americans suffer with gout, or about five percent of all arthritis cases in the United States.

Gout is an inflammatory form of arthritis that causes feelings of sharp sudden pain in some joints, accompanied by redness, swelling, warmth and tenderness. Many people relate gout to a swelling of the big toe. While the big toes are often affected, there are other parts of the body that may be stricken with the symptoms of gout. The knees, heels, ankles, elbows, wrists and fingers can also become sore and inflamed. The instep of the foot is another area where swelling and tenderness can occur.

Men are most commonly affected by gout, with males accounting for the majority of gout victims in the United States. Most of these male patients range in age from thirty to sixty years. Of course, women can also develop the disease, and gout does occur in an estimated one in ten women.

Medical professionals believe that gout is caused by an over production of uric acid in the body, but most researchers agree that genetics also play a role in the development of the disease. While many people are prone to an over development of uric acid, each person's individual body determines whether he or she will develop gout. Some people are able to pass the uric acid freely through the system in their urine, while others will become afflicted with gout. In some patients, there is a high level of uric acids retained in the blood. The overabundance of uric acids has also been known to cause sodium monourate crystals to collect in the synovial joint fluid. This, in turn, creates gout and causes stiff and painful joints.

If someone in your family has a history of gout, then you are at a greater risk for developing the condition. It is possible, however, that the disease may develop as the direct result of other underlying conditions. Lifestyle choices are also important pieces of the puzzle. Certain dietary choices have been directly linked to the onset of gout. Some foods, called "triggers" include meat proteins, beans, gravies, sweet breads and seafood, particularly anchovies. All of these foods are rich in purines, and it has been proven that eating too many of them can cause gout. Eating recklessly, whether overindulging or eating too little, can be a major contributing factor to the development of gout. In other words, both overeating and crash dieting can trigger the condition.

There are other factors that can cause gout. Excessive stress and exercise, severe illness, high blood pressure, joint and muscle injury and chemotherapy have all been linked as potential gout-causing conditions. Medical researchers have determined that in all of these circumstances, a patient's immune system and overall health have already been compromised before the onset of gout.

If gout runs in your family, there are ways that you can protect yourself. Eating a varied and well-balanced diet, learning to manage your stress and keeping healthy are all good rules to live by. For more information on gout, it's causes and ways that you can prevent it, speak to your doctor or family health practitioner.